

GOP LEADERSHIP CONTINUES TO TRY TO KILL REAL MANAGED CARE REFORM

On Thursday, October 7, 1999, the GOP leadership suffered a humiliating defeat when 68 Republicans defied their leadership and joined with 206 Democrats and 1 Independent to pass the strong, enforceable Dingell-Norwood Managed Care Reform bill despite the fierce opposition and strenuous lobbying of the GOP leadership. Hence, the Dingell-Norwood bill passed by the overwhelming strong vote of 275 to 151.

However, the House and Senate GOP leadership have not conceded defeat. Instead, they have been working overtime to ensure that the Dingell-Norwood bill is killed in the conference committee.

Most recently, on February 1, Senate Majority Leader Lott announced that Senate Assistant Majority Leader Nickles is one of the most vehement opponents of meaningful managed care reform and will chair the managed care conference committee.

This DPC analysis will show how:

- ! The House GOP leadership stacked the conference committee with opponents of real managed care reform;
- ! The House and Senate GOP leadership have also been using delaying tactics as a way to kill real reform;
- ! Certain key House and Senate GOP leaders have vowed to ensure that the weak Senate-passed bill emerges from conference; and
- ! Similarly, the GOP's special-interest allies have also vowed to kill the Dingell-Norwood bill in conference.

House GOP Leadership Stacked The Conference Committee With Opponents of Managed Care Reform

First, on November 3, in a cynical attempt to foil managed care reform once and for all, the House Republican leadership stacked the conference committee by allowing only one GOP Member who voted for Dingell-Norwood to sit on the conference committee.

This action by the GOP leadership is especially striking when one considers that almost one-third of House Republicans voted for the Dingell-Norwood bill. Flying directly against the will of the House, the Republican leadership even refused to appoint as conferees the two key GOP cosponsors of the Dingell-Norwood bill: Rep. Charles Norwood (D-GA) and Rep. Greg Ganske (R-IA).

Following is how the USA Today summarized the action of the GOP leadership:

A Last month, nearly one-third of House Republicans defied party leaders and joined Democrats to help approve a broad managed care reform bill. On Wednesday, House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., packed a critical House-Senate negotiating committee with Republicans who opposed the legislation. Only one of 13 Republicans who Hastert named to the conference committee voted for the House-passed bill.@ (USA Today, 11/4/99)

GOP Congresswoman Marge Roukema spoke out against the Speaker=s action. She stated, AObviously, he wants to block any legislation that is consistent with what the House passed. It=s really a foul play.=@ (USA Today, 11/4/99)

House and Senate GOP Leadership Have Also Used Delaying Tactics As A Way To Kill Real Reform

Furthermore, ever since October, the House and Senate GOP leadership have also been using the strategy of delay, delay, delay in their efforts to kill the strong, enforceable Dingell-Norwood bill.

First, the House GOP leadership delayed four weeks last fall before appointing conferees to the House-Senate managed care conference committee B with the House having passed the bill back on October 7 and the House GOP leadership waiting until November 3 before appointing conferees.

Furthermore, during the remaining three weeks of the 1999 session, there was not one meeting of the House-Senate managed care conference committee. The purpose of this GOP delay strategy was to stop the momentum that was obtained by the strong bipartisan vote for Dingell-Norwood in the House.

Therefore, it is now four months since the House passed the strong, enforceable Dingell-Norwood bill and no progress has been made on getting a bill to the President=s desk!

Certain Key House and Senate GOP Leaders Have Vowed To Ensure That Weak Senate-Passed Bill Emerges From Conference

Furthermore, since the House passage of the Dingell-Norwood bill, certain key House and Senate GOP leaders have vowed that they are going to do whatever they can to ensure that nothing like the Dingell-Norwood bill (despite its passage by a strong margin) will emerge from the conference committee B and instead a bill much closer to the weak Senate-passed bill will emerge.

Indeed, the stacking of the conference committee and the delaying strategy are all part of the GOP leadership=s efforts to ensure that the final bill is much closer to the Senate-passed version.

Following are some typical statements that have been made by these GOP leaders:

After the House vote, Senate Assistant Majority Leader Don Nickles (R-Okla.), who is likely to lead the Senate negotiators, said he would be >drawing a line= against the broader reforms approved by a bipartisan majority in the House.@ (Washington Post, 10/8/99)

A Majority Leader Trent Lott, R-Miss., said compromise eventually could be found >if they do it right= by agreeing to >something like= the Senate managed care bill.@ (CQ Daily Monitor, 10/13/99)

The week after the House passed a broad managed care overhaul, Senate Republican leaders showed little enthusiasm for reconciling the bill with one the Senate passed in July. ... House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., on Oct. 15 expressed the same concerns.@ (In article entitled *A Senate Leaders Dig in Heels Against Making Concessions to House Managed Care Bill,*@ CQ Weekly, 10/16/99)

Finally, Special Interests Have Also Vowed To Kill Dingell-Norwood Bill in Conference

Finally, the special-interest allies of the GOP that have been fighting a strong managed care reform bill for three years B the HMOs, the health insurance industry, and employers B have vowed to continue their multi-million-dollar battle now that the bill is in conference. Here=s what Republican Charlie Norwood had to say about the influence of the Special Interests:

A>I want both Republican and Democratic patients to win,= he [Charlie Norwood] said. >To accomplish that, both parties need to honor the will of the people, instead of the will of the lobbyists. As I recall, that is our job, and that is our duty.=@ (Wash. Post, 11/4/99)

The influence of these Special Interests is as pronounced as ever. Here are some statements by the representatives of these special interests who are vowing to kill Dingell-Norwood in conference:

AKaren Ignagni, with the American Association of Health Plans, vowed to defeat the legislation when the conference begins. >This fight is not over,= she said.@ (Atlanta Journal, 10/8/99)

A>To see nothing come out of conference is my hope,= said Bruce Josten, executive vice president for government affairs for the United States Chamber of Commerce. >The best outcome is no outcome.=@ (Los Angeles Times, 10/8/99)

AAnother major lobbying group, the Health Insurance Association of America, is not ready to compromise. Charles N. Kahn 3d, president of the association, which represents both traditional insurers and HMOs, said, >We

have never taken any public position other than >just say no.= We oppose legislation in this area at this time.=@ (New York Times, 10/9/99)

A Neil Trautwein, the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) director of employment policy concluded, >In the immortal words of John Paul Jones - I have not yet begun to fight!@ (Washington Post, 10/13/99)

A Patrick Cleary, another NAM employee, chimed in later Friday that they would be >fighting this thing in conference, making sure liability,= meaning the expanded rights to sue employers and HMOs that deny needed treatment, >never sees the light of day.=@ (Washington Post, 10/13/99)

The pattern of obstruction is clear B the Special Interests, working with the Republican leadership, will use everything in their means to kill meaningful health care reform. Yet, despite all the obstacles put in their path, there is a bipartisan coalition in the House who understand the importance of HMO reform for America=s working families and will continue to fight vigorously for enactment of strong, meaningful managed care reform.